

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

Decision Made: 5 March 2010

**NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATES - DISCRETIONARY, CHARITABLE RATE RELIEF**

**Issue for Decision**

To consider an application for discretionary rate relief from Jennifer Price.

**Decision Made**

That discretionary rate relief be awarded to Jennifer Price up to a maximum rates value of £1,600.00 which equates to a maximum cost to the Council of £400.00.

**Reasons for Decision**

The Council's current policy regarding rate relief for charitable and other similar organisations is as follows:-

<b><u>CHARITY/ ORGANISATION</u></b>	<b><u>RELIEF</u></b>
Religious	80% (Mandatory, no Discretionary)
Charity Shops	80% (Mandatory, no Discretionary)
Educational	80% (Mandatory, no Discretionary)
Welfare	80% (Mandatory, no Discretionary)
Recreational	80% (Mandatory, no Discretionary)
Youth	100% (80%Mandatory 20%Discretionary) (excluding School primary/secondary/further education)
Village Halls	100% (80% Mandatory,20%Discretionary)

Schools are specifically excluded from qualifying under the Youth category element to avoid any complications that might arise as a result of an

application being received from a school that does not qualify for relief under the Education provision.

The current policy does not currently allow for any discretionary rate relief to be awarded, with the exception of the amounts listed in the Youth Organisations and Village Halls categories.

### Jennifer Price

Jennifer proposes to occupy an assessment in Maidstone and her application was as follows:-

"My name is Jennifer Price and I am the Head organiser of a non-profit art exhibition that we plan to hold in Maidstone town centre early next year for two weeks. I have gathered together a large group of Maidstone artists from the famous (Graham Clarke, and awaiting confirmation from Vic Reeves) to recent graduates and those still studying (students of UCA) and wish to exhibit their work for their town to see. I believe it is important for a town to know its own artists and likewise for an artist to know his/her town. The aim of this project is to bring all aspects of Maidstone together with art, in this case, as its catalyst. It is about community. We have sponsorship from local Maidstone businesses, support from local galleries, help from local people and would love to include the local council in this too.

Another of our key aims is to utilise space created by the recession, and work with the recession as our theme. We want to take a vacant building and turn it into a gallery for two weeks. I believe there are quite a few benefits to this. One of these benefits is that it shows the vacant lots possibilities to possible buyers, and promotes regeneration. Another benefit is that it creates a less daunting space for the local people to see art in, and prevents the alienation that galleries can sometimes cause on its potential viewers. We see this as a chance to show a whole new audience the art they have on their own doorstep. We will support the theme of the recession and regeneration further by presenting affordable, original artwork for them to buy (with all the payment going straight to the artist).

However, being a non-profit event we are struggling with some elements of our costs. Through sponsorship and donation 'in kind' of time and skills we have been able to cover a lot of our costs and begin to make this event a success, but we have a large amount still to cover. We are hoping that the council will see our event as acceptable for discretionary rate relief. Having discussed the rates on the size of building we are looking at with very helpful members of your team we believe the rates for two weeks will amount to around £800. This is a really hard blow for us. I understand we are not a registered charity and that as it is run solely by myself, with the help of a team of artists as my management team, we may not be the obvious choice. However, I strongly believe in this project and its possibilities for Maidstone Community as a whole, and hope its benefits to the community are taken into account.

We are currently designing our publicity material (10,000 postcards, 200 a4 posters, 100 a3 posters – all donated through sponsorship by

Maidstone Businesses). I would love to be able to add "with support from Maidstone Borough Council".

I hope to hear from you soon."

Miss Price has indicated that the occupation will be of a unit the size of 24 High Street, Maidstone for a period of some two weeks. This assessment has a rateable value of £42,250 with a current annual charge of approximately £20,500.00. On this basis, the rates due for a two week period of occupation will be in the region of £1,630.00.

If 80% discretionary Rate Relief were awarded, this would amount to approximately £1,304.00. As no mandatory rate relief has been allowed, only 25% of any discretionary relief is borne by the billing authority. The awarding of 80% discretionary rate relief will mean that there is a charge of some £326.00 to the Council's General Fund.

If 100% discretionary Rate Relief were awarded, this would amount to approximately £1,630.00. As no mandatory rate relief has been allowed, only 25% of any discretionary relief is borne by the billing authority. The awarding of 100% discretionary rate relief will mean that there is a charge of some £407.50 to the Council's General Fund.

As stated above, these are only proposed costs for a proposed period of occupation. The true costs cannot be known unless and until an occupation occurs, but Ms Price has asked whether or not the council would be prepared to support this venture.

I made the decision to award this rate relief as I believe this is a unique opportunity to support Community Art in Maidstone as part of the Council's on-going commitment to regeneration.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

An alternative would be to cap an amount of relief to ensure that the council knows the maximum cost that it might incur in the event that relief is awarded. If the council were to agree relief that would cost the council a maximum of £400.00, this would mean that rates up to a value of £1,600.00 would effectively be met by discretionary rate relief. Miss Price would then be aware that she would have to pay any rate liability in excess of £1,600.00. I have decided to go with this option for the reasons mentioned above.

### **Background Papers**

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Scrutiny Manager by: <b>12 March 2010</b>
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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES**

Decision Made: 5 March 2010

#### **WEBCASTING**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider enhancing the webcasting service as set out in the report of the Democratic Services Manager.

##### **Decision Made**

That the proposed enhancements to the webcasting service, as detailed in the report of the Democratic Services Manager, be agreed.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

At the Council meeting on 25 July 2007, it was resolved:-

- (i) That agreement be given in principle to the public proceedings of meetings of the Council and its Committees being web-cast with the exception of the Planning Committee, Planning Referrals Committee, Licensing Committee, Licensing Act 2003 Committee and Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee; this decision to be formally reviewed in six months; and
- (ii) That Overview and Scrutiny Committees may decide that a particular meeting, or part of a meeting, shall not be web-cast and that, where this is agreed, the reason should be minuted but no member of the public should be identified in the Minute.

Planning Committee have since decided to webcast their meetings.

Since the introduction of webcasting, the number of people viewing the webcasts has increased. Attached at Appendix A to the Report of the Democratic Services Manager, is a table setting out the 'hit' rate for various meetings for the period 1 October to 31 December 2009.

Following initial separate discussions with Media On Demand, our webcasting provider, and Modern.Gov, our Committee Administration software provider, a meeting was initiated between the two providers to consider the possibility of integrating the two together so that anyone viewing the Agenda of a past meeting could click on an icon next to the Agenda Item which would take them directly to the beginning of that particular item on the webcast recording. They have confirmed that this is possible.

Media On Demand were also requested to look at enhancing the current webcast in the following ways:-

- Allow Agendas to be displayed within the graphics player window prior to and during live events
- In addition, content within the Modern.gov Management System will be available for displaying such as committee members names, maps, images and PowerPoint slides (this will be particularly useful for Planning Committee)
- To create index points after the event
- To show speaker names
- To increase the size of the video window

Media On Demand have put forward a proposal for the above enhancements at a one-off cost of £3,000 to cover the cost of the work required to make the changes to the system configuration to link with Modern.Gov. The current monthly fee will remain the same and we will be limited to 15 hours of video content per month. Over the past 18 months, we have gone over this limit on only 4 occasions.

To help ensure that the limit of 15 hours per month is not exceeded, the hours being used during each month will be monitored and, if necessary, meetings that have a low hit rate will not be webcast. This will ensure the most popular meetings will always be webcast. Please note that Council, Planning and Cabinet meetings will always be webcast.

The one-off cost of £3,000 will be met through existing budgets and there is no increase to the current monthly payment.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

I could decide not to enhance the webcasting service but this is not recommended as the enhancements will provide a much better service for the public and members alike and will help to increase the number of hits received.

### **Background Papers**

None

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